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## Risch's short reign packed with accomplishments

Gov. Jim Risch proved he would not be a placeholder. He did enough work during his seven months in office to fill a four-year term. He was a no-nonsense, get-the-job-done leader. Though many, including us, did not agree with everything Risch demanded, most would say he has been tenacious and thoughtful in pursuing his agenda.

Risch was sworn in as Idaho's 31st chief executive in June after Gov. Dirk Kempthorne became President Bush's secretary of interior.

After more than 30 years in state government, Risch reached the highest podium and he didn't hide his enthusiasm. When appointed he said: "I love this job! And do you know what else? They pay people to do this!"

He performed with a true respect for the state and with an agenda he was passionate about. While he relished the limelight, he made his reign his own. He did not coast in the footsteps of a predecessor. He changed the way we fund schools and pay taxes, and he wrote a budget for the next fiscal year.

Risch, with his wife, Vicki, close by his side, changed the lives of every Idahoan, and we consider him to be the most influential person of 2006. Risch's list of accomplishments is long. He made more than eight key appointments, including his replacement at lieutenant governor, district judges and heads of government agencies. He named a state "drug czar" charged with tackling Idaho's methamphetamine problem and addressing an audit that showed drug-fighting efforts were in disarray and without a clear plan.

Risch formed a nursing task force to find solutions to the nursing shortage and to make room for more Idaho nursing students. Experts predict a shortage that could affect future health care for every Idahoan. Risch, Idaho's lieutenant governor from 2003 until last June, also ran a successful re-election campaign, and he will resume the job of second in command on Monday.

He had so much he wanted to do that lack of time became a frustration, he said. After only a few weeks on the job, Caldwell GOP Sen. John McGee said of Risch: "It seems like he's been the governor of Idaho for years."

Risch, a lawyer who owns a cattle ranch and has a bachelor's degree in forestry, was aggressive in his approach to environmental issues. Besides supporting two wilderness bills to protect the Boulder-White Clouds and the Owyhee Canyonlands, he had three glowing environmental achievements. He protected the state from mercury pollution, preserved Thousand Springs as a state park and created a national forest roadless plan for more than 9 million acres of Idaho forest land. Risch even put a Democrat on the state Fish and Game commission. "I had a job to get done and I got it done," Risch said.

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He also showed he is quick to make a decision, even in controversies that affect very few Idahoans. When an Eastern Idaho elk rancher's herd escaped, threatening the health and genetic purity of wild elk, Risch acted forcefully, directing the Idaho Department of Fish and Game to immediately catch or kill the escaped animals.

He also had the task of finishing work left undone by Kempthorne, implementing Medicaid reform and forwarding Kempthorne's highway plan.

But Risch will most be recognized for overhauling the way we pay billions of dollars in taxes.

Lawmakers adjourned in 2006 without giving Idahoans property tax relief. This was unacceptable to Risch because he'd heard the demands of homeowners wanting relief. He promised to find a solution. His plan was straight forward. The state would move \$260 million in public school funding from local property taxes, and raise \$219 million in sales taxes to cover much of the difference.

He called a one-day special session where only his plan would be discussed. He was confident he'd get approval from lawmakers; otherwise he would never have called for it. So in one day, he pulled off what lawmakers couldn't do in an entire session.

The debate has raged in newspapers over whether his property tax relief really is a benefit to schools or homeowners. But voters gave him a huge thumbs up in the November election by endorsing the tax change by an overwhelming 72 percent. The advisory ballot was carefully crafted language by the former trial lawyer, but he got what he wanted from 105 lawmakers and Idaho voters.

Risch has decades of experience in Idaho politics. He's well-connected, politically savvy and genuinely enjoys his job. It's time for Risch to step back into his part-time job and spend more time on his ranch with Vicki, their three sons and six grandchildren.

But his time in office will not be forgotten. His reign is the shortest governorship on record but certainly not the most subdued. His actions will have influence on the way we live for decades.